Vikram Seth's fictional works are always fascinating because of the varied forms they possess and the presentation of different geographical localities in them. His first novel, *The Golden Gate* is written in verse form and the subsequent novel, *A Suitable Boy* resembles the three-decker novels of the Victorian age. His third novel, *An Equal Music* thematises Western classical music. Realism plays an important role in all the three novels as the major narrative strategy. In addition to his insistence on Realism, Seth's novels share a unique social consciousness in them. Though Seth is categorized as a realist writer by many critics, a full length study of his fictional works using Realism as the major narrative tool is lacking in the literary arena. Seth's unique social consciousness which makes his fictional works different from the pioneers of the genre in Indian Writing in English is another area which lacks attention. The study evaluates Seth's success in using realism as a major narrative tool in his fictional works and explicates how Seth's unique social consciousness reflects in them.

The major thrust of this research work is the study of the articulation of realism in Seth's novels. Various theories of realism are studied and based on the study, the following definition of Realism is arrived to explicate Seth's texts and to find out the particular type of realism in all of them.

> Realism is an approach to literature which concentrates on a truthful presentation of stories, characters and settings that are familiar to us in the contemporary every day world, with a spacial and temporal necessity of the present or recent past. The

> events are arranged in a linear fashion with a characteristically omniscient narrative point of view. The locale, plot and denouement are the result of the author's direct observation or are based on reliable reports. The characters and story line are plausible, and in this, they are commonplace, rather than ordinary. The working and middle classes are adequately represented, since they form the majority of the society. Realist novels, in another sense, are a faithful copy of our surroundings, where the relationship between the author, reader and the text are determined by a poetic reflection of reality.

A writer's social consciousness is the consciousness he/she shares within a society while observing its various formations. It can also be defined as the writer's social awareness; the awareness of the problems that different societies and communities face on a day-to-day basis and his/her keenness to be conscious of the different cultural, political and civic aspects of the society. A writer with an acquired social consciousness derives his or her viewpoint from the mainstream culture which he/she tries to fictionalize. A realist writer uses his social consciousness to construct his ideology in formulating his characters and events in the narrative body of the text. George Lukacs in his *The Meaning of contemporary Realism* has defined realist literature as a concrete representation of actual persons inhabiting a palpable identifiable world. As a realist writer, Seth faithfully represents the

society in and around him. The thesis evaluates how Seth fictionalizes the society using realism as the major narrative mode.

Based on the above concept, Seth's social consciousness as a sensitive writer towards various social issues and its different reflections in his novels are explored.

Accordingly this thesis is divided in to five chapters. In the first chapter an overview of realism has been made. Realism as a critical mode, the various viewpoints of the leading critics of the genre, different socio-political developments that led to the emergence of this particular critical school and a definition of realism suitable to analyze Seth's works are discussed. The historical development of Realism and its transformation in the postmodern context are also explored. Emergence of realism in the European context is explained by presenting the various viewpoints of the masters of realism such as Balzac, Dickens, Flaubert, Duranty and Lewes. George Lukacs' views on realism are discussed in detail so as to incorporate the social aspect of realism. Structuralist and poststructuralist approaches to realism are discussed by analyzing Roman Jacobson, Roland Barthes, Philippe Hamon and Wolfgang Iser. In order to analyze Seth's verse novel *The Golden Gate*, a discussion of realism in poetry is also made.

In the second chapter, an overview of realism in the Indian fiction in English is made. Important writers of the realist school such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Khushwant Sing, Manju Kapur, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy and Aravind Adiga and their representative works are

analyzed to establish the preponderance of realism as a narrative mode in Indian Fiction in English. The various developments that have undergone in the Indian society in the formative period of realism in Indian Fiction in English are also discussed. The chapter also analyses how realism in the Indian context differs from the realism in the European context. Indian and European societies differ in many respects and accordingly the concept of truth and individuality differ in both the societies. Difference in treatment of realism is visible in European and Indian fiction. Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Vikram Seth etc adopt their own versions of realism to fictionalize the society they represents. By analyzing the representative works of masters of realism in the Indian context, the chapter tries to establish this point.

Chapter three thoroughly analyzes the various features of realism in Seth's three novels. Seth's narrative strategy, characterization, realist style, depiction of social reality, truthfulness of plot and narration etc are discussed in length and breadth to ascertain the realist characteristics of the novels under study. Seth does not follow the cannons of European realism in letter and spirit in his fictional works. He is guided by his own notion of society and individuality while depicting his characters in his novels. By analyzing various features of realism in Seth's novels, an honest attempt is made to identify the peculiarities of realism practised by Seth. Linear narration, particular realist style, adherence to truthfulness and peculiarities of characterization In *The Golden Gate* are discussed. Due importance of the above as well as other

features specific to the individual texts are also given while analyzing *A Suitable Boy* and *An Equal Music*. *A Suitable Boy* is given importance while analyzing the realist features, since it is the author's *magnum opus.* Seth's positioning of his characters in different geographical localities in his three novels, Viz. *The Golden Gate, A Suitable Boy* and *An Equal Music* contribute richly to realism when he realistically narrates the different socio-cultural realities of the locales specified.

Chapter four analyses how Seth reveals himself as a socially conscious writer through his novels. In order to ascertain Seth's unique social consciousness, the various social issues that appear in his novels are discussed. Seth's depiction of Indian and European realities in his three novels reveals his realistic approaches to social issues. The American and European social realities are faithfully represented by Seth in *The Golden Gate* and *An Equal Music*. Seth's depiction of the hyper-modern American society, the individualism of the characters, interpersonal clashes, nuclear and homosexual issues, familial discontent and Seth's deliberate attempt to inculcate Indian values in his Euro-American characters are discussed in this chapter. These novels are analyzed to ascertain how Seth achieves his artistic fulfillment through realistic narration. Seth's representation of Indian social realities is explored in this chapter by analyzing *A Suitable Boy*. Seth's realistic depiction of various Indian cultural events, inter-segmental relationship in the society, life of the under-dog, Hindu-Muslim amity and animosity, post-partition paranoia and distrust, the Zamindari Abolition Bill and the plight of the Indian

feudal class etc are discussed to reveal Seth's unique reactions and reflections on social issues as a sensitive member of the society in which he lives. Seth's *magnum opus* is a manifesto of his humanism and new found Indianness and these factors are richly addressed in this chapter. Seth's fictionalization of history and its contribution to realism are also discussed.

Chapter five concludes the findings of this research work. A earnest attempt to establish Vikram Seth's use of realism and his social consciousness through rigorous research has been made. The achievement of Vikram Seth as a realist writer is discussed in detail. The uniqueness of Seth's realism through the analysis of the novels under study is summarized in the conclusion. The chapter also brings out the common features of his novels analyzed and thereby establishes Seth's thematic unity in all the three novels. The motif of search and music that run through all the three novels are also mentioned. The conclusion follows a select list of works cited.